Semitones

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Semitones

By

A. A. C.

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To Edmund Clarence Stedman
Poet Philosopher and Man of Letters
This Little Volume is Inscribed
By The Author

Author's Note

The lines entitled October Days appeared in the year 1867. The sonnet, Beata Beatrix, was published in 1904. The other verses contained in this volume are now printed for the first time.

PRELUDE

Words are the organ-stops whereon
The rhythmic songs of life are played,
Ere yet the faltering hands are stayed,
The key-board closed, the player gone.

It is so far from thought to word
That half the image is unseen,
And half the harmony unheard,
So much there is that lies between.

Not by the outer ear alone,
Some finer hearing may descry
The hidden melodies that lie
Between the tone and semitone.

This edition consists of 500 copies printed on Japanese hand-made paper.

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Who ranks the least in love's degree
Can best intone the songs of love,
As blind men in dark places move
More readily than those who see.

They stumble not, nor do they touch
The stones that bruise our laggard feet;
But we have known life's bitter-sweet
And lived in love's clear light too much.

SONNETS

INTRODUCTION

LIKE as a mother finding all forlorn
Her truant children, bounteously kind,
Knowing their faults—yet willing to be blind—
And to what imperfection they were born,
Opens her arms to shelter them from scorn,
So these, the errant children of my mind,
I gather tenderly and fain would bind
My life with theirs till both shall be outworn.

You, my first-born, along what perilous ways,
And far, you went ere you came here to rest!
And there be even those who deem you dull
My Benjamin, deserving only praise;
And you, perhaps of all, I love the best
Because no other finds you beautiful.

I.

WARMED by the soft Sicilian skies that shine
Where the Madonian hillsides, drawing near,
Slope to the sea, or else descending sheer
By steep and devious footway and incline,
Fall to the faëry vale of Proserpine,
Faunus, reclining, piped unto my ear
The reedy songs that serpents rise to hear,
Half hid in tangled greenery and vine.

Sudden a figure—solemn, filleted,
Finger on lip as if to stay my breath—
Parted the almond-blossoms and there stood
Oak-crowned, outlined against the dusky wood;
And when, half welcoming, some word I said
The answer came, "I am not Love, but Death."

II.

THE music ceased ; the songs of life and cheer
Were stilled; the reed went rattling to the ground;
Beyond the fountain, momently, the sound
Of fleeing goat-feet clattered loud and clear,
And I, with one whom all these creatures fear,
Alone remained: the very air around
Partook of silence; I, no longer bound
By Pan's enchantment, saw the mien severe ;
Said to the presence, "Since thou art not Love
Leave me in peace."—"Aye, to the very end
Shall peace be thine; no more Love's torment now
Will trouble thee, nor any passion move."
So hearing this, I said, "Come nearer, friend,
And let me feel thy touch upon my brow."

AT DAYBREAK

WHEN the gray dawn was deepening into red,
Above the hills a slowly widening zone,
Just at the hour when earth is most alone,
My lost love came and stood beside my bed;
Pearl white her pinions, arching overhead,
And in her eyes such soft compassion shone
That all my sorrows lifted and were gone.

"I am God's handmaiden now," I thought she said,
"And minister to them that once I knew;"
"O why are you so kind to me?" I spoke;
"Have you not grieved enough?" she made reply,
And then a great peace filled me through and through;
She leaning forward, I, poor fool, awoke
And saw the red light flaming in the sky.

BEATA BEATRIX

WOULD it were true that we shall live again
To walk in gardens where no grief may go,
And only gladness through life's stream shall flow,
After this comedy of ruth and pain;
My eyes look out, beyond the mist and rain,
To those far fells whereon the gods bestow
Such grace as lesser beings may not know;
There would I journey were it not in vain.

Ah, then what joy that final cup to drink,
Borne by the angel that Rossetti drew!
So might I find thee, by some river's brink,
Gathering those deathless flowers that never grew
In our dark world, or anywhere, I think,
Save in our dreams—I would that it were true!

THE DAYS THAT WERE

THE days that were before I saw thy face,
How distant and how shadowy they seem!
Like the bewildered vision of a dream
They came, they were, they vanished into space;
Yet now I know that each day had its place
In Life's economy, a thought supreme,
A lovely variant of a lovely theme.

They were not wasted; these I now retrace
Hid in the arras hanging in thy room;
Birds, flowers, tombs, Graces, figures manifold
Woven of those departed days long gone;
And these are radiant tissues from the loom,
Fit for thy starry garments; this the gold
And Tyrian for thy feet to tread upon.

ATLANTIS

WHO has not seen it, high in heaven set,
Cutting the skies in lines as clearly drawn
As when, from Bordighera's grove at dawn,
Far Corsica is seen in silhouette!
Vision of purple cloud and parapet;
Look well upon it ere the light be gone,
For there thy dearest hope is held in pawn;
It is the palace of thine own regret.

There is the land that lured thee to delight.
Stretching away beyond those luminous spires;
Enchanted river, wood and waterfall,
All vanishing upon the verge of night:
Behold the home of all thy lost desires!
Look upon Lethe flowing by the wall!

OBLIVION

COULD Love abide, apportioned to our need,
And all his bounty to our race inure,
Peopled by Love with all things bright and pure,
Could Love abide, then earth were heaven indeed.
And yet, when Love's companion, Death, we heed
No more we seek to know if Love be sure,
But, rather, ask could we this world endure
With Love and Death to be our daily meed?

Alas, poor Love! a thousand lowly mounds
On every hillside mark his sure decay;
The day declines; the air is dark and chill;
Through tower and tomb the winter wind resounds;
By household fires how many hearts are gay,
Unmindful of the slowly darkening hill!

CAPRICE

EASY it was to love in the old days,
When, for a silken girdle or a glove,
Men moved on earth as constellations move
In the great field of heaven before our gaze.
Dauntless they rode along disputed ways
And couched at night, content for very love,
On the bare ground with the cold sky above;
Careless were they alike of blame or praise.

But now what hapless circumstance is mine!
Frowns are my arrows, glances are my spears,
And I oppose them with a shield of glass;
Oppressed by fashion of these later years
I see my lady in her carriage pass,
Further from me than tented Palestine.

THE DANCING BEAR

CHAINED in a brewer's vat, the wretched beast
Feels underneath a slow illumined fire;
Now lifts one foot and then another higher,
His body swaying with the flames increased;
Enlivens merrily a village feast
Where gaping rustics gather to admire;
Until, with muttering and moaning dire,
He learns, at last, to dance—that knew it least.

And, later, in the pleasant country lanes,
The music pulsing in the summer air,
The merry children thronging in the place
Remind him of that furnace of despair;
So, to the poet, a memory remains,
As if the tears were rolling down his face.

THE HEADLESS STATUE

IN some forgotten Alp or Apennine
There is a winding road—the only door
Into a valley, like a level floor,
Circled about with cypress and with pine.
There, in a garden, at the day's decline,
I sat upon a marble bench before
A headless statue, twined with hellebore,
Ancient as Bacchus and his wreathèd vine.

'Tis Pan, with ready fingers poised above,
Holding a flute where once his lips had been,
But silent now, since all his song must die
With lack of breath to utter—Ah, my love!
How can I breathe the song that is within?
How can I voice the heart's most bitter cry?

"Perhaps we are led and our loves are fated,
And our steps are counted one by one;
Perhaps we shall meet and our souls be mated,
After the burnt-out sun."

Edwin Markham
The Homing Heart

LOVE IS ONLY A MEMORY

"Just one picture hung in the room
The saddest story that art can tell;"

T. B. Aldrich.

SO long, so long ago
It was, they could not know
In what forgotten clime
Their hearts were tuned in time;
By what cerulean sea
They beat in harmony,
The half, each single soul,
Of one perfected whole.

So far apart they went
They could not be content,
The while, from world to world,
Their sundered souls were whirled:
Though Time, in mercy, cast
A veil upon the past,
Still, as the ages grew,
Something their spirits knew;
Something of their old love
Shone on them from above;

They heard incessantly
The sound of that great sea ;
Their souls within them burned,
Nor knew for what they yearned.

Again, by some strange chance
Or sport of circumstance,
Again upon this earth
Their spirits had their birth;
Again she came to him;
Just at the outer rim
Their circles touched—small blame
If both broke into flame!

Sinful it was we know,
For the wise world said so;
And so thought one who sent
Both to their banishment,
And bade the lovers hark
Back to the primal dark.

Grim Florentine, who stood
With Virgil in the wood
And on Hell's murky throat
Your fateful legend wrote!

Who, peering through the gloom,
Saw Farinata's tomb,
And saw, as in a glass,
The murdered lovers pass,
Could not your wit devise
Some greater sacrifice?

Behold their punishment!
His eyes on her are bent,
His arms about her thrown,
She is not there alone;
And he can see and hear
All that to him is dear;
While on them from above
Still shines immortal love.

THE DREAM

THE DREAM

I KNEW it was a dream—and yet
My feet upon that path I set,
And followed on that winding way
Down to the very end of day.
Down through the ever deepening wood
I followed far until I stood
Where no one ever stood before ;
Above me, in the sycamore,
The wood-owl whimpered plaintively;
Dark water to my foot was nigh;
It was the same, that sullen stream,
And yet—I knew it was a dream.

On, on into the night I went
Until my store of strength was spent;
And all the bitterness, the care,
The wretchedness of life was there;
No hope was in me to withstand
The horror of that lonely land.

Sudden, a dwelling to my sight
With open door was all alight;
There was a supper-table spread,
The guests were seated—at the head
Were you who are my heart's despair,
And by your side an empty chair;
Your eyes embraced me at the door,
"Ah why did you not come before?"

To me, your smile was heaven's bright beam,
And yet—I knew it was a dream.

INTERLUDE

IF words are only empty sound
What profit lies in songs like these?
Yet we have seen the Pleiades
In pools of water on the ground:

Or, peering in a little glass
No greater than a handbreadth wide,
Beheld the lordly planets pass
That sway the seasons and the tide.

All that I am or hope to be
I strove in singing to rehearse,
And found it in a single verse
That holds the Pagan world—and thee.

TRIOLETS

IN DECEMBER

IT is June when my lady goes by,
With the sweep of her gown and her grace;
Though the calendar's there to deny,
It is June when my lady goes by;
For the warmth of the earth and the sky
With her coming is full in my face;
It is June when my lady goes by,
With the sweep of her gown and her grace.

WHEN Doubt came in at the door
Then Love flew out at the grating;
But he turned for a look once more
(When Doubt came in at the door)
At the firelight on the floor
And the warm little corner waiting;
When Doubt came in at the door
And Love flew out at the grating.

A STRAY GLANCE

IT was only a look she gave
And a strain of music dying
Like the sound of an ebbing wave;
It was only a look she gave—
But we carry such to the grave
In pay for a life's denying;
It was only a look she gave
And a strain of music dying.

UNTIL DEATH DO US PART

IT was hardly worth while to say it,
So soon was the word forsworn;
With a priest and a ring to stay it,
It was hardly worth while to say it;
Since love and the doubt to slay it
Of the same desire are born,
It was hardly worth while to say it,
So soon was the word forsworn.

INTERLUDE

I WORSHIP what you might have been;
I know it is not what you are,
For you were like a falling star,
A moment glorious—then unseen.

All men must lose what most they prize;
There is no permanency here;
Only a memory and a tear
And splendor failing from the skies.

LYRICS

SONG

LOVE comes not to thy call,
And stays not for thy word;
His vagrant footsteps fall
Unseen, unheard.

I whispered Love to stay
A little while, a breath,
E'en though the lingering day
Be one with Death.

THY mouth is the rosebud's hue;
Thy cheek is the eglantine;
Thine eyes are the tender blue
Of the lotus-flower divine.

Bloom of the East and West
God gave thee for thine own,
And hid, in thy flowery breast,
Instead of a heart—a stone.

INSUFFICIENCY

SO many things I longed to say
To her who is my heart's delight,
I said them over day by day,
I held them in my mind at night.

But, when at last the moment came
That I so long had wished might come,
Before Love's burning altar-flame
My tongue was mute, my lips were dumb.

LOVE COMES BUT ONCE

ONCE, and once only, will you greet
The guest you have so longed to see;
Mind that the room be swept and sweet
With lavender and rosemary.

Once, and once only, will you hear
At break of day that low, clear call;
Awake! Awake! for Love is near,
He brings his bounty to your wall.
He brings the dawn, he brings the dew,
He bids you open wide the gate;
Be it with heartsease or with rue
Say never that Love came too late.

Once, and once only, will you greet
The guest you have so longed to see;
Mind that the room be swept and sweet
With lavender and rosemary.

YOU are my blessing and my woe,
My honey-bee with sweet and sting;
Among my flowers you come and go
And set the winds a wondering;

For you, more mutable than they,
Flit like a firefly in the night;
Among my flowers you will not stay,
Your very beauty is your blight.

Let someone spread, as someone will,
Enough of gold before your eyes
And you would leave Hymettus' hill
To follow carrion with the flies.

SONG

THY voice is in the whispering wind,
Thy breath is in the breeze;
Thy dwelling-place I may not find
Among the murmuring trees;
On earth I know not where thou art,
Save in the longing of my heart.

And when to heaven I lift my eyes
Among the stars above,
I cannot find thee in the skies,
Thou art not there, my love;
In truth I know not where thou art,
Save in the longing of my heart.

TWO SONGS FOR MUSIC

Written for E. E.

I

SONG

SOMETHING there was of sorrow,
Something there was of wrong,
And all was wrought in sadness
Into a little song.
Something there was of longing,
Something there was of woe,
And all was bound in melody
A hundred years ago.

Something there is of darkness,
Veiling a deeper dream
Of long-remembered music
Heard in the twilight gleam:
I wonder who is singing,
And how she came to know
That someone was heart-broken
A hundred years ago?

II

SERENADE

DARK lies your scented garden
That blossoms red and white,
Faint with the breath of roses,
Wet with the dews of night.

No flower falls from your window,
For me no light will shine;
The gods of life's undoing
Took care of yours and mine.

And only in your slumber,
Where we alone may meet,
Across the fields of Dreamland
I come to you, my Sweet.

INTERLUDE

WE pay the price for what we gain;
Nothing is given, all is bought,
And, at the barrier of thought,
Our gold is balanced, grain for grain.

For, when the nightingale sings best
And all the darkling hedgerows hear,
It is a thorn against his breast
That makes the tone so liquid clear.

True art is sorrow crowned with art;
He pays who, for a little fame,
Hearing at last the loud acclaim,
Hides from the world a broken heart.

THE NIGHT COMETH

WHEN I shall be among the wise,
With one thought folded in my breast,
A brother to the Centuries,
I shall not know you when you pass,
Nor feel your footfall on the grass.

O tell me now, while I may hear,
And heal my hurt and give me rest;
Speak to me now, the dusk is near,
Speak to me, dearest, ere the night
Shall blot you from my mind and sight.

SO bitter is the bread I eat,
So close my life runs to the lees,
That I would be a child, my Sweet,
And weep my heart out at thy knees.

Yet do I honor thee no less
To be thy lover, though as far
As Hagar in the wilderness
And thou as distant as a star.

IT IS QUITE EASY TO BE WISE

THE word is passed, the seal is set,
I must not love you any more;
We now have only to forget
And all will be as once before.

It is quite easy to be wise
And lay our memories to rest,
But who can say they will not rise
Like odors from a sandal chest

That lies in some neglected room,
With brazen lock securely fast,
All redolent with faint perfume
To make us mindful of the past.

IF I CAME BACK

IF I came back at the dead of night
And pillowed my head where once it lay,
Would you welcome me with the old delight,
In the same fond words you were wont to say?
Or flee from my arms in sheer affright?

When the dying day and the darkness blend,
If I came back from my lowly bed,
How would our greeting begin or end?
"Love me forever," of old you said,
So tell me, which would it be, my friend?

THE GARDEN

THY heart is like a garden close,
With butterfly and floweret gay,
Wherein narcissus and the rose
And pansies vie in sweet array.

And there do Joy and Grief abide,
Thy gardeners; the sun and rain,
Joint almoners with wind and tide,
Do bring thy pleasure and thy pain.

If I may only look therein,
Or lean a moment on the wall,
I am more blest than I had been
With angels in their heavenly hall.

(Dolores Sings)

HE whom I love with all my mind,
To me is hardly more than kind,
Because his recreant soul is set
Upon a faithless, cold coquette.

And she will scarcely look his way,
But seeks another soul to sway;
Yet is her wish in vain—this one,
Alas! has eyes for me alone.

REJOICE AND COMPLAIN NOT

YOU love her with your heart and mind;
With others she is frank and gay,
Familiar, open as the day;
To you alone she seems unkind,
Reserved and distant, disinclined
To smile, or even look your way;
For, womanlike, she long has known
How close your thought is to her own,
And, womanlike, she will not care
To let her own eyes linger where
Your eyes like burning stars are set:
Fool! would you wish her to forget?

THE BLIND VIOLINIST

WHO taught thee that mysterious smile?
Whence came that wondrous tone?
"I saw thee, dear, a little while
Ere yet the day had flown."

Some in the sunshine lose their sight,
And some with tears and pain;
Some look their last on all delight
And never see again.

THE FIRST KISS

DROP, on this fallen clay,
The tear thou wouldst not shed;
Unto this dull ear say
The word before unsaid.

Leave to their silence now
The lips thou wouldst not press,
And on this passive brow
Let fall thy first caress.

THERE ARE NO FETTERS FOR THE MIND

THERE are no manacles to bind
My thought of thee; no axe to kill;
No chains, no fetters for the mind,
And I may worship where I will.

So, while by day and day apart
We drink of bitterness our fill,
In the rose-chamber of my heart
I may embrace and love thee still.

ACROSS THE DINNER TABLE

THY face in tangled hair is set,
(So sits the spider in his net.)

Thine eyes invite the soul's desire,
(So burns the opal's baleful fire.)

Lithe art thou in thy silken sheen
As the green serpent in his green.

Not with an appetite more nice
Amina picked her grains of rice,

Ere, from her lips with languorous breath,
Her lover drank the dews of death.

THE red sun, like a scimitar,
Hangs in the darkening sky;
And the sounds of earth are hushed and far,
As they will be when we die.

Wind-swept the boundless plain below,
The bare boughs overhead,
And the whirling leaves that come and go
As they will when we are dead.

I, sunk with unremembered men,
You, in your marble pride,
What will we be to each other then—
Who have already died?

INTERLUDE

WE cannot keep what we have won;
Relentless to the end we move;
The noblest work, the purest love,
Must die with the decadent sun.

The radiance falling from afar,
To shine on worlds already dead,
Is tinctured with the baleful red
That marks the cooling of a star.

Æons are but a little span;
The worst will soon be as the best;
The plummet swings from east to west,
All—all must end as it began.

So little hope, so little trust!
Yet is my flower of life decreed
To bloom for thee, in thought and deed,
Until we mingle with the dust.

"WHOEVER feels that he would not like to think out to the end every thought that comes into his mind should turn away from art. . . . . He who would be an artist must melt down everything."

—*George Moore.*

THE Pharisee is smug and clean,
He thinks the thoughts that others think
And does the things that others do;
His neighbor's path he follows through,
Stops at his neighbor's well to drink;
All his imagining is mean,
No room is in his narrow creed
For nature; he, with all his kind,
In every parlor in the land,
Hate what they do not understand,
Unto the inner light are blind,
Are envious in thought and deed.

In poverty, unkempt and wild,
Uncomprehended, slighted, blamed,
The artist with his own thought stays
And gives the world an answering gaze,
As innocent and unashamed
In spirit as a little child.
From his own thought he cannot shrink,
All things are tribute to his art,
No fear is his, no littleness,
The truth he labors to express;
Fidelity is in his heart,
And faith is more than meat and drink.

Rather would I be one of these
To live away from all my kind,
And season with salt tears my bread,
Having no place to lay my head,
Yet hold Truth's image in my mind,
Than dwell among the Pharisees.

ANTHEM

"Oh! that I knew where I might find Him!"

—Book of Job.

THINE ear is deaf; no errant word,
In all the ages that are gone,
Of all our praying hast Thou heard;
Of all our mournful cries, not one.

Thy lips are dumb; no voice of Thine
The endless, envious years have known;
Unto our sight has come no sign,
Unto our waiting ears no tone.

Thine anthem priest and pagan sing;
They gather round Thine altar-flame;
They worship, to whose worshiping
No benediction ever came.

They name with awe Thy dread abode;
Thy dwelling they decree so far
That all must perish by the road
In Thought that leaps from star to star.

ANTIPHONE

They search too far who seek Thee there,
  When Thou art near in flower and sheaf;
Thou art the answer and the prayer,
  Alike believer and belief.

KING FOR A DAY

WHO, down this busy street
In glittering pomp and pride,
With tramp of horse's feet
Comes in such state to ride?

One who, erewhile unknown
On some small errand bent,
Along this road, alone,
Unnoticed came and went.

But now men stand apart
To give his chariot room;
The carter turns his cart,
The weaver quits his loom;

And children leave their play
To see the splendor pass,
With plumes of black and gray
And panoply of glass.

So, lest our common clay
Lack all ennobling,
Death, for a single day,
Makes every man a king.

REQUIEM ÆTERNAM

LET this be graven on the tomb,
That they may learn who loved thee best,
"Whoever to this place may come,
Lord, give them an eternal rest."

Let not their naked souls be blown
By winds that wander in the dark,
Nor yet from shore to shore unknown
Be borne by Charon in his bark.

But let the kindly earth enfold
All that was born at Earth's behest,
And, best of all Thy hand can hold,
Lord, give them an eternal rest.

THE GATES OF SLEEP

ALL day those portals shine afar,
They glisten in the sun;
An angel sets the door ajar
When the long day is done.

Silver and gray his vestments are,
And, with unerring hand,
He leads us where a single star
Lights all the solemn land.

The dwellers in that star-lit space
Are not the friends we see,
But those who, with averted face,
Departed silently.

Angel of night lead on apace,
The doors of Sleep unbar,
And guide me to that trysting-place
Lit by a single star.

LA JOIE FAIT PEUR

I fear no enemy's device;
No harm can reach my soul's retreat;
Nor loneliness, nor sacrifice
Can turn my purpose to defeat.
I know that death is but a call
Back to the place from whence we came;
There is no future to appall,
No circle of eternal flame;
I fear not fate, for I am made
Of sterner stuff than those who quail—
But, at the touch of joy I bleed,
With happiness I faint and fail,
When comfort comes I am afraid,
Ah, then I am a coward indeed!

CARPE DIEM

THREE things I would not know :
The day when I shall go
Unheralded, alone,
Into the All Unknown;

Nor where, by land or sea,
My level bed shall be;
Nor what my Love will do
When I with life am through.

ABROAD, in the misty city,
The great gray houses loom;
Over the roofs of London
I see them from my room.

Over the roofs of London
I see the fine rain fall,
And my eyes turn from the window
To a picture on the wall.

My eyes turn from the window,
And the sky is warm and blue
Clear to the edge of the desert
Where the caravan came through.

Clear to the edge of the desert
Stretches the sunlit sky,
Over the sands of Asia
As the camel train goes by.

Over the sands of Asia
The wandering tribesmen fare,
Each on the back of his camel,
Rugged and brown and bare;

Each on the back of his camel,
Muffled and gaunt and grim,
They dream of the palm tree growing
On the desert's utmost rim;

They dream of the palm tree growing
Where the waters leap and flow—
Over the roofs of London
The river is dark and low;

Over the roofs of London
There is only grime and gloom,
But we are afar where the camels are,
The star-spring and the bloom!

THE ruined roof is prone to fall,
Where built the swallows long before:
The gate hangs rusty on the wall;
The path is grass-grown to the door.

Gray lichens moulder in the place
Where once the honeysuckle grew;
Gone is the glamour—gone the grace;
The Old remains to mock the New.

Time works his pleasure, good or ill;
He touches part, but not the whole;
Lo, from the crumbling casement, still
Looks out the indomitable soul!

COMPENSATION

TO all sad souls who walk with Truth,
Knowing the world rewards not well
Artist or singer, age or youth,
A voice comes ringing like a bell.

Across the interminable years
It sounds from Weimar's lonely towers,
"Who never ate his bread with tears,
He knows you not, ye heavenly powers!"

The giant hand that writ the word
Long since has fallen to decay;
That mighty heart, with passion stirred,
At last "compounded is with clay;"

But what shall quench the voice that said,
"Who never, through the wakeful hours
Of night, sat weeping on his bed,
He knows you not, ye heavenly powers!"

WITHIN THY BREAST

UNWEARIED through the dust and din,
And through the day that blinds us all,
The sturdy laborer within
Taps with his hammer on the wall.

The night is made for rest and peace,
The laborer should slumber long;
And will thy knocking never cease,
Now sounding low, now sounding strong!

And must thou labor night and day?
Who bids thee toil so late my friend?
"My workshop is this wall of clay,
'Tis my own coffin I must mend."

SO rudely into being thrust,
We know not whence we come nor why;
A little dew above the dust;
A little fragrance ere we die.
How scant the blossoms that we cull!
Even our joys are pitiful;
We dance, we sing, and over all
Projects the shadow of the pall.

In silk attire we are at ease
Because some others toil and sweat;
We do not sleep but one of these
Keeps watch, whose eyes with tears are wet;
We do not eat but some brute life
Is bludgeoned into endless night;
Oh, is there not enough of strife,
Enough of pain, enough of blight?
Or, is the world no longer young
And Love no better than a name,
That one should steal the serpent's tongue
To blast another soul to shame?

THREE CLOWNS AND A NIGHTINGALE

THREE clowns, a bird imprisoning,
Tried, each in turn, to make it sing.

The first, withholding drink and food,
Left it to pine in solitude.

The second pinched and hurt the bird;
But still no note of song was heard.

The third clown sat beneath a tree;
"I'll bide my time, sweet bird," quoth he:

Ere long the night was in the sky
And the forest rang with melody.

OCTOBER DAYS

O rare October days! Ye leave your strange
Foreshades of things ideal everywhere:
Autumnal glory crowns the mountain range;
Autumnal rapture floods the trancèd air:
Steeped in a golden languor sleeps the sky,
As sinks the drowsy sun into his rest,
Where burning clouds in crimson masses lie
Athwart the glowing portal of the West.

The waning sunshine softens over all;
Unto the music of sweet-voicèd rills
Enchanted lights and shadows rise and fall
Within the charmèd circle of the hills:
The hazy wold a magic vision seems;
The far-off heights a fairy glamour take;
And distant headlands, dim as Summer dreams,
Immerge their purple shadows in the lake.

From the brown stubble-fields on either side
Is heard the mellow piping of the quail;
And, from an opal sky faint-flushed and wide,
The Hunter's moon looks down, serene and pale:
On steeps remote the parting sunbeams rest;
Illusive shapes the bosky hollows fill;
Then twilight shades the quiet glens invest,
And all is dim, and mystical, and still.

BALLADE

IN what domain of earth or sky
Are you whom I have found so fair?
Whose perfect grace my lines imply;
Whose loveliness is my despair;
To what dim court shall I repair,
With sonnet, song and roundelay,
To charm your footstep to the stair?
I do not know—I cannot say.

What wondrous lights and shadows lie
In Isabella's auburn hair!
(Her mouth is just a bit awry;)
Clarice is blithe and debonair,
(To hear her voice I hardly care;)
Estella has your eyes of gray,
(How came her nose so tipped in air?)
I do not know—I cannot say.

Sweet Alice renders sigh for sigh,
Her smile is fitted to ensnare;
She holds her gown a trifle high,
Her ankle—well, that's her affair!
But, on a crowded thoroughfare
In crossing on a windy day,
I fear there's nothing much to spare
I do not know—I cannot say.

L'ENVOI

Your colors in my casque I wear,
I will adore you while I may;
Dear Goddess, are you anywhere?
I do not know—I cannot say.

PARAPHRASES

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

From the French of Alfred De Musset

MY sisters, in grace and guile,
One fatal gift you share;
To entrance Man with a smile
And delude him to despair.

A laugh we can hardly hear;
A look, an unspoken word,
When one who loves you is near,
May cut his heart like a sword.

He turns away his head
And hides the wound in his breast;
Yet, truly, when all is said,
I count his part the best.

He turns his face aside,
But his is the nobler part;
Better the martyr's pride
Than the headsman's habile art!

LA VIE

From the French

HOW vain the comedy of life!
A little hate, a little strife;
A look uplifted to the sky,
A laugh, a bow, and then—good-by.

How brief the spell that holds us here!
A little hope, a little fear;
A little love, a little light,
A wish outworn, and then—good-night.

THE BALLAD OF ROSE MARY

THE BALLAD OF ROSE MARY

I

IN heaven a calm, clear night befell,
A time of stars on high,
And all the prisoners in hell,
Each from his horror haunted cell,
Looked out upon the sky.

Then, chief among the sounds of pain
And songs of sacrifice,
One soul took up the old refrain,
"O send me back to earth again,"
Above all bitter cries.

"When I was wed with bell and ring
My heart by man was won,
I loved not God nor anything
But him who was my lord and king,
For this I am undone."

"Because I loved not God alone
My soul is cast aside;
How could I be in love with one
Whose presence I had never known,
Or be a spirit bride?"

"I loved the thing He sent to prove
My faith, and set apart;
I held it all the world above,
I gave it all my human love,
And hugged it to my heart."

"For this I am in bitter woe
And live in endless pain;
Ah, that an angel would bestow
One gift of heaven and let me go
Back to the earth again!"

"My body lies beneath a stone,
By death yet undefiled;
The sorrow is not all my own,
Those that I love are left alone,
My husband and my child."

"A twelve-month more has passed away
With Winter, Summer, Spring,
Soon comes again the boreal day
And the wind that smote me where I lay
And left them sorrowing."

"At morn he leaves his lonely bed
To labor with his hands;
The wind beats down upon his head,
Yet must another mouth be fed
With harvest from the lands."

"I hear the farm-latch click at night,
I see the cattle come;
And, in the mellow evening light
The swallows circle in their flight
Round what was once our home."

"He lifts the latch—the fire is dead,
Upon the hearth no spark;
No flame to make the rafters red,
There is no supper table spread,
And all the house is dark."

"The rats run riot in the gloom,
They clatter in the hall;
His refuge is a lonely room
That needs a basin and a broom,
And needs me most of all."

L. of C.

"Ah, once I was his hands and feet,
His lamp, his light, his life!
His wine to drink, his bread to eat;
Behold him maimed and incomplete,
A man without a wife!"

"The young, warm body that I had
Lies stiff beneath a stone;
My limbs in cerements now are clad;
Be merciful lest I go mad
And perish here alone."

High o'er the dreadful towers of hell,
Only the cruel stars
Give ear unto the souls that dwell,
Each in his separate sunken cell,
Pent in by prison bars.

For the plague of hell, the bitterness,
Is not of fire and chains;
The spirit knows its own distress,
Is eaten up with loneliness,
And nothing more remains.

II

Once in a year, it is decreed,
An angel of the Lord
Comes down from heaven to intercede
And stand before hell's gate and read
Some sanctifying word.

Then Satan, with high courtesy
And chivalrous intent,
Deigns, with a mock humility,
A single spirit to set free
From hell's environment.

So when the angel came again
And stood with drooping wings;
He heard the piteous refrain
And begged the soul's release from pain
Above all other things.

Her body lay beneath a stone
By death yet undefiled;
No ghastly change her flesh had known,
Her face had even lovelier grown
As if she slept and smiled.

The name they gave her at her birth
Was graven on the stone;
Ah, faithless one, how little worth
To love her when she was on earth
And not when she was gone!

She did not dream—she could not know
A thought so fugitive,
For she was one of those who grow
To love us when we are laid low,
As well as when we live.

The calm, the cruel stars looked out
On field and farm and fold;
The pump was frozen at the spout,
The watch-dog dragged his chain about
And whimpered with the cold.

Not with the savor of decay,
As other forms have come,
But fresh as on her wedding day
Rose Mary came along the way
To what was once her home.

Her heart, ah, who can tell how glad,
How firm it was, how brave!
In her own raiment she was clad,
The warm, sweet body that she had
Was risen from the grave.

How grateful after long exile,
How glad we cannot know,
But round her lips the spirit smile
Caressed her mouth and eyes, the while,
As in the ground below.

There stood the farm before her sight,
The roofs all round about;
The gates were wide, the rooms were bright,
The windows cast great squares of light
Upon the road without.

Alas, for love and sacrifice
In days that went before!
Quick terror was there, and surprise,
But naught of kindness in the eyes
That saw her at the door.

Ah, that another should embrace
The lips that once were hers!
She saw the horror in his face,
There was no welcome in that place
For spirit trespassers.

* * *

Far better that the dead should sleep
Through everlasting years;
They cannot rise, the grave is deep;
They do not know the faith we keep
With hypocritic tears.

When once the funeral bell is tolled
No welcome waits above;
If one were risen from the mold
The man would come to claim his gold;
The wife to claim her love.

TO F. A. C.

I WOULD these little songs of mine
To some neglected land might be
Borne, as upon an Indian sea,
Not for the world's behoof, but thine.

Borne to a land where we alone
Might dwell on some forgotten shore,
And only hear the ocean's roar
And not the critic's caviling tone.

Small then my audience, but rare,
My frailest lines would bring delight,
As dullard children, in the night,
Are wrapped with tenderness and care.

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